When the United States moved, in 1973, from a conscription-based system to an all-volunteer force, it fundamentally changed the justification for—and the underlying logic of—military service. In America’s selective service system, conscription was justified by the conjoined rights and obligations of citizenship; military service was defined as a (male) citizen’s obligation. In profound contrast, the AVF relied on the principles of the market: the labor market, of course, but also the marketplace of consumer capitalism. As the army, in the wake of the Vietnam war, tried to compete for recruits, it worked consciously and in fairly sophisticated ways to recast the meaning of military service. In this new world, military service was not a citizen’s obligation but a market opportunity. Such shifting logics have shaped not only the US military force but, arguably, its actions in the world.

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